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IX.

RECENT MISCELLANEOUS LITERATURE.

1. Weisse's Origin, Progress, and Destiny of the English Language and Literature.
2. Holmes's John Lothrop Motley.
3. Conway's Demonology and Devil-Lore.
4. Mrs. Kemble's Record of a Girlhood.
5. Tyler's History of American Literature.

IF Mr. Weisse's book were what it professes to be only, it would be accepted as a close and learned analysis of parts of its subject, laboriously written and rather laborious to read. A great part of it, however, is positively, it might almost seem purposely, *à propos des bottes*. It distinguishes nicely the component parts of English speech, and traces carefully their mode of introduction into the rude primal tongue of the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons. And in doing this the author explains that he "alludes throughout the work to thoughts, ideas, languages, literatures, and events that acted and reacted on the English language and literature." The explanation is hardly broad enough to cover nine pages in praise of women, from Eve down, ending with an argument for woman-suffrage. This is no more pertinent to the subject treated than is an elaborate laudation of the press or an outburst against the Turks.

This fullness may come from the author's purpose to illustrate actions and reactions on the English language. It is no doubt possible to show how governments can impress on the speech of their subjects marks of freedom of spirit or servility. Or it may be proved that a nation's chief pursuit, as commerce or war, gives a turn and character to many expressions of its language. But a course of reasoning and comparison would be needed for this. The accumulation of facts does not prove such a process unless they are brought to bear upon it.

The author justly regards the close of the sixth century, when the Christian doctrines, together with the Roman alphabet, numerals,

and calendar were brought into England, as the beginning of Anglo-Saxon progress. It is shown how much Alfred contributed to form his country's language and found her literature, and how greatly the decay of both was hastened by William's invasion. Within a century after that event, Anglo-Saxon ceased to be a written language. Its substitute, formed by mingling its relics gradually with Græco-Latin words, was polished and enriched in the fourteenth century by Chaucer, who deserves to be styled the father of the English tongue, as well as the father of English poetry.

So from century to century the author follows the development of the English language, pointing out the accretions to it from foreign sources. Each century-chapter is summed up by a table analyzing the proportion, in the works of the chief writers of the period, of Anglo-Saxon words and of Græco-Latin ones. In the sixth century, the proportion in a hundred words is ninety-four of the former to six of the latter. In the sixteenth, the strangers have usurped forty-eight places, leaving fifty to the natives. The proportion of the elements in English as now written is fixed, through a similar analysis, at sixty-eight Græco-Latin words to thirty Anglo-Saxon and two Celtic.

Mr. Weisse is by no means an Anglo-Saxon purist. He admits that three fourths of its original idioms have been replaced by foreign ones. The substituted and added words have increased its vigor and refined its aptitudes for the utterance of thought and the promotion of action. Its progress inspires the author with faith that it will at last rise to be the ruling speech of the world, and modulate itself into a perfect instrument for the use of the race.

A man unconsciously describes himself better than any one else can describe him. Delicate and firm as are the touches Dr. Holmes gives to the portrait of his friend Motley, they express his character less than do the extracts from his letters, which fill too few of the pages of this memoir. It is not their vivid descriptions, their subtle art criticism, or their story of patient toil, that holds the reader's attention in these letters. It is their passion of love for country and jealousy of her honor. His temperament made Motley just the man to represent our country in Europe at the crisis of her fate. He was no civil formalist, no cold phrase-maker. The equal of any among the diplomatic body in accomplishment and graciousness, he met them with a noble frankness, an intense zeal for right, which must have impressed on his associates his own conviction that our civil war could end only in one way. This effect is reflected in

the prescience of events, the just estimate of probabilities, with which he writes.

Motley portrayed himself in some of his works more consciously than in his letters. His growth out of an indifferent novelist into a consummate historian is something curious in the annals of literature. Scott, it is true, wrote a history later than his novels, but the novels were admirable and the history very poor. Voltaire was an historian after being a story-teller, but his works are only two kinds of fiction. Schiller wrote his "Thirty Years' War" after his "Geisterseher" (attributed in this memoir to Goethe), but his fame rests on his works of neither class. Motley soon learned, partly by failure, where his strength lay. His genius gave the historian's philosophic insight—his peculiar powers supplied the historian's method and style. If his individuality impressed the latter with too much warmth and fullness, the fault was an excess of richness, not a defect. His patient, conscientious toil in gathering and analyzing materials was admirable. Dr. Holmes does a service to the cause of letters in holding up this noble standard—commending the old classic *improbus labor* to those who rush impatient and unfurnished into what they are pleased to call a literary career.

The limits of this memoir forbid any detailed criticism of Motley's great histories. The author describes the pride without surprise with which the writer's friends received them, and the delight of multitudes of readers which welcomed them. The opinions of acknowledged censors in the literary world, too, are quoted—the notices of the great foreign reviews, and approving letters from famous men. But the highest tribute to his genius is yielded by the enthusiasm it roused in the phlegmatic bosoms of Dutch scholars.

An unwelcome task remains to the author, who must vindicate Motley from the aspersions and misrepresentations that attended his diplomatic career. The motives and the details of such persecution as befell Motley are usually shrouded in state secrecy. In this instance they come out in full light, revealing human infirmity among those highest in place, and striking upon the ugly features of personal spite and irritation. If vehemence is shown in the justification, it is that of ardent friendship, quickened by sympathy of nature. The Vienna history is simply that of a high-spirited, sensitive man, resenting the unworthy thrusting upon him by officials of a contemptible slander that should never have been noticed. The statement of Motley's retirement from the English mission is more involved. The author analyzes the case at great length, and,

we think, redeems Motley from all misconstruction, placing him in the position of an unjustly treated public servant.

This memoir is the simple expression of tender and fervid friendship, not without fair discrimination, by one who loved its subject for high and fine qualities, with which his own nature can sympathize. The author calls it only an outline, which may be of service to a future biographer. No other hand than his own should venture to complete it.

Mr. Conway appends to his name on the title-page of "*Demonology and Devil-Lore*" his degree-mark of B. D. of Divinity College, Harvard University. He omits a motto. We suggest "*Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens*." He would scornfully ask if it is not plain on every page that he worships no false gods? Perfectly so, and equally plain, for all the pages show that he worships no gods at all. Granted that he may have convinced himself that the religion of our day is a "creed outworn." Then, if he attacks it, it is his duty to commend a substitute. At least, let him not deal bitterly or sneeringly with "the fair humanities of old religion." For millions these are still the breath of life. If the writer really believes Christianity to be a superstition, he will not strive to scoff men out of it any more than he would wish to frighten them into it.

The double title of the book denotes a distinction between its subjects. Devils are not demons. They differ in age, demons being the eldest creation of human fancy and fear. They differ in character, the acts of demons being impelled by the necessity of their nature, while devils work with a malignant will. As the author states the distinction, the first personate the obstacles with which men have had to contend in the struggle for existence, as hunger, cold, destructive elements, darkness, disease. The latter represent the history of the moral and religious struggles through which churches and priesthoods have had to pass.

The idea of a personal spirit of evil is the correlative of that of a personal divinity. The primal thought of man that imaged the last as a source of good must have been driven by the evil in nature to shape the first as its cause.

One race copied or inherited the thought from another, and religion followed religion in adapting it to its needs. This principle of dualism is carefully traced out by the author through a varied series of legends and impersonations. We look in vain, however, for the ultimate statement of the matter, which is really this: The origin of evil has nowadays almost ceased to be discussed. Evil is

held either to be permitted by the Supreme Being as a discipline, or, less theologically and more scientifically, to be the clinging taint and weakness of the lower order of things out of which humanity has emerged. In either case there is no need of a personal evil spirit, and none the less need of a guiding divinity, for whom the author seems to find no place.

The author traces the modern idea of an evil spirit to the conflict of religions. Nothing is more normal, in ancient systems, he says, than the belief that the gods of other nations are devils. When the new religious system prevails, the old idol is treated with respect, and assigned some function in the new theologic *régime*. The logic of this theory does not recommend it ; but it is ingeniously carried out through speculations too subtle to be even summarized. In the course of them many traditions of our religion, now conceded to be myths, are handled with the needless irreverence and obtrusive contempt which weaken the author's hold on the reader's convictions.

Ingenious, however, and elaborate, his book certainly is. Its researches present the story of every kind of goblin, imp, specter, dragon, and thing that walketh in darkness, that has made human life piteous since it began. It is rich in curious legends and myths of the darker sort, and it is a startling proof of the halting progress of mankind, that some of the most ancient and horrible of these superstitions, as the dread of the vampire and the were-wolf, prevail at this day in certain parts of Europe.

Few women could employ the evening of a life in tracing the remembrances of its early prime more agreeably than Mrs. Kemble does. Her story ends abruptly, dramatically, with the words "I was married at Philadelphia, on the 7th of June, 1834, to Mr. Pierce Butler, of that city." Scarcely more than a third of her conscious and active life is represented by those twenty-five years. Yet there is nothing immature in this girlhood. It is filled with little incidents, bright people, clever sayings. There is not much sentiment, but plenty of honest, hearty family affection. The whole memoir is so spirited, sunny, and confidential, that one reads it, twenty pages at a time, with the kind of interest felt in reading a play.

The book is a record in substance as well as by its title. Soon after her return to England from a French seminary, an acquaintance grew up between Miss Kemble and a Miss H—— S——, which on their separation was continued by correspondence. Her

own letters, together with others to Mrs. Jameson, the author of "Characteristics of Women," form the thread of this autobiography. The description of her friend H—— and the reflection of her letters in her own inspire regret that the other half of the correspondence does not exist.

The author confesses herself to have been a wayward child, from high spirits and freakishness only, and quite as much her parents' puzzle as their pride. Her girlhood soon sobered into quiet, under the pressure of the self-denials compelled by her father's part ownership of Covent Garden Theatre, a bankrupt, Chancery-ridden property from the beginning. If the engraved likeness prefixed to the book belongs to this time of her life, she must have been at least pretty, though she calls herself plain, and speaks of the thick outline of her features. Later, during her first visit to this country, her look was striking, from the fire of her eyes and the tropical richness of her color, at least when seen from a distance.

Hereditary tendency and the consciousness of genius might not of themselves have urged her to the stage. But the growing difficulties of her father's position forced her to think of some means of gaining a livelihood. Surrounded by a famous histrionic family, with the sense of dramatic capacities, it was natural that the stage should win her, even if it did not attract her. It certainly did not attract her. She speaks of it as a profession which honorable conduct may make respectable, and as an avocation which she neither liked nor honored. Of her own part in it she says that she certainly made a poor actress, not from want of talent, but for want of cultivating it with care and industry. Macready's opinion was that she did not know the rudiments of the profession ; but that of the public on two continents seemed different. During this girlhood she acted in all the English and American capitals with success, applause, and profit. She was not a Siddons, it is true, but she was a great deal of a Kemble.

Those who personally knew Fanny Kemble on her first visit to this country, which fell in the days of a past generation, remember her as being absolutely veracious, wholly without humor, of a rigid, inelastic mind, and set prepossessions. These qualities are plainly displayed in her record. Those pages of it which relate to this country are just to its sky, its scenery, its autumn, and equally just, though far from being as complimentary, to its people. In her own land she is more interesting. Hundreds of persons and personages crowd her pages, hardly one of whom passes without

an anecdote or a clever turn of description. She has the art of giving a character in a sentence, and condensing a biography into a paragraph. One reads this animated and entertaining record of Mrs. Kemble's earlier life with the hope that she may intend to complete it by the memoir of the brighter and happier years, at least, among those that followed her spring-time.

The first and easier part of the task proposed to himself by Professor Tyler is well done. His materials fall naturally into the plan sketched out, without being so abundant as to confuse his choice. His general purpose is strictly adhered to—that of first marking the peculiar accent of literary production in each isolated group of colonies, derived from its special character, and then following the assimilation of these utterances as they blended and at last grew into protest and resistance against the control of the mother-country.

The author's labor in research and comparison, with his acute note of the differences in style and subject among the writers he passes in review, might lead us to rest content with his judgment of their respective merits. But he modestly completes the critic's function by submitting to the reader's examination liberal extracts from their performances. The book adds to its own merits that of being an anthology of early American literature.

Certain influences shaping it were common to all the colonies. They brought letters and traditions from the same home. With one exception they all inherited Protestantism. They were all settled on the sea border of a new continent, exposed to like dangers and hardships. But the moral differences were as great as the physical resemblances in their condition. Among the languid Carolinians, the pleasure-loving Virginians, the money-making New-Yorkers and the ascetic New-Englanders, literature was nourished by very diverse elements. To distinguish why this was so, and by illustrations to prove how it was so, is the purpose of these two volumes, which cover the period between the settlement of Virginia and the assembling of the first Continental Congress in 1765.

Virginia, that sheltered the first colonists, also produced the earliest writers of the New World. Captain John Smith caused to be published in London, in 1608, his "True Relation of the Early History of Jamestown Settlement"; a book, the author assures us, not unworthy to be the beginning of the new English literature in America. Free extracts from his writings justify this opinion, adding interest to the lively sketch given of "that extremely vivid and resolute man." William Strachey's account, written three

years later, of his voyage and wreck with Sir Thomas Gates, not only displays a power equal to De Foe's, but interests us also as the supposed source of suggestions for Shakespeare's "Tempest." But it is pointed out that the influences favoring the growth of a literary class in Virginia were mournfully weak and few. New York fares a little and only a little better, at least in her later days. The city is described as little more than a drowsy and prosperous Dutch village during the greater part of the colonial time, without any concentrated and continuous literary activity.

It is only when he reaches New England that the author finds a promising field and ample material for his researches. Theology of course holds the first place in New England literature. It does not exclude, however, much excellent work in political disquisitions, historical tracts, and natural history, with occasional attempts of less merit in poetry. From their position and profession the clergy naturally took the lead in letters in New England. In spite of their narrow and cruel theology, whose iron grasp cramped and wrenched even the noble intellect of Jonathan Edwards, they found in its treatment ample room for logic and eloquence. The "dynasty of the Mathers" is described at length, and the performances of "that vast literary and religious coxcomb," Cotton Mather, impartially criticised.

Among a crowd of other writers, John Wise, who has passed into utter obscurity, is characterized as the most brilliant prose writer produced in this country during the colonial time. The passages given from his works sustain this high opinion.

It is impossible in a brief notice to do justice to the merits of this remarkable book. Its range is so comprehensive, and its details so varied, that no epitome of it can be fairly presented. Even without the examples that fill so many pages, the author need not fear to be found vague or wearisome. It is much more than a history of literature, illustrating men and manners as it constantly does by clear side-lights. Its style deserves praise for clearness and dignity, though its use of epithets is sometimes a little *hasardé*. The succeeding volumes, treating of the more complex and difficult field of later American literature, will be looked for with interest.

A. R. McDONOUGH.